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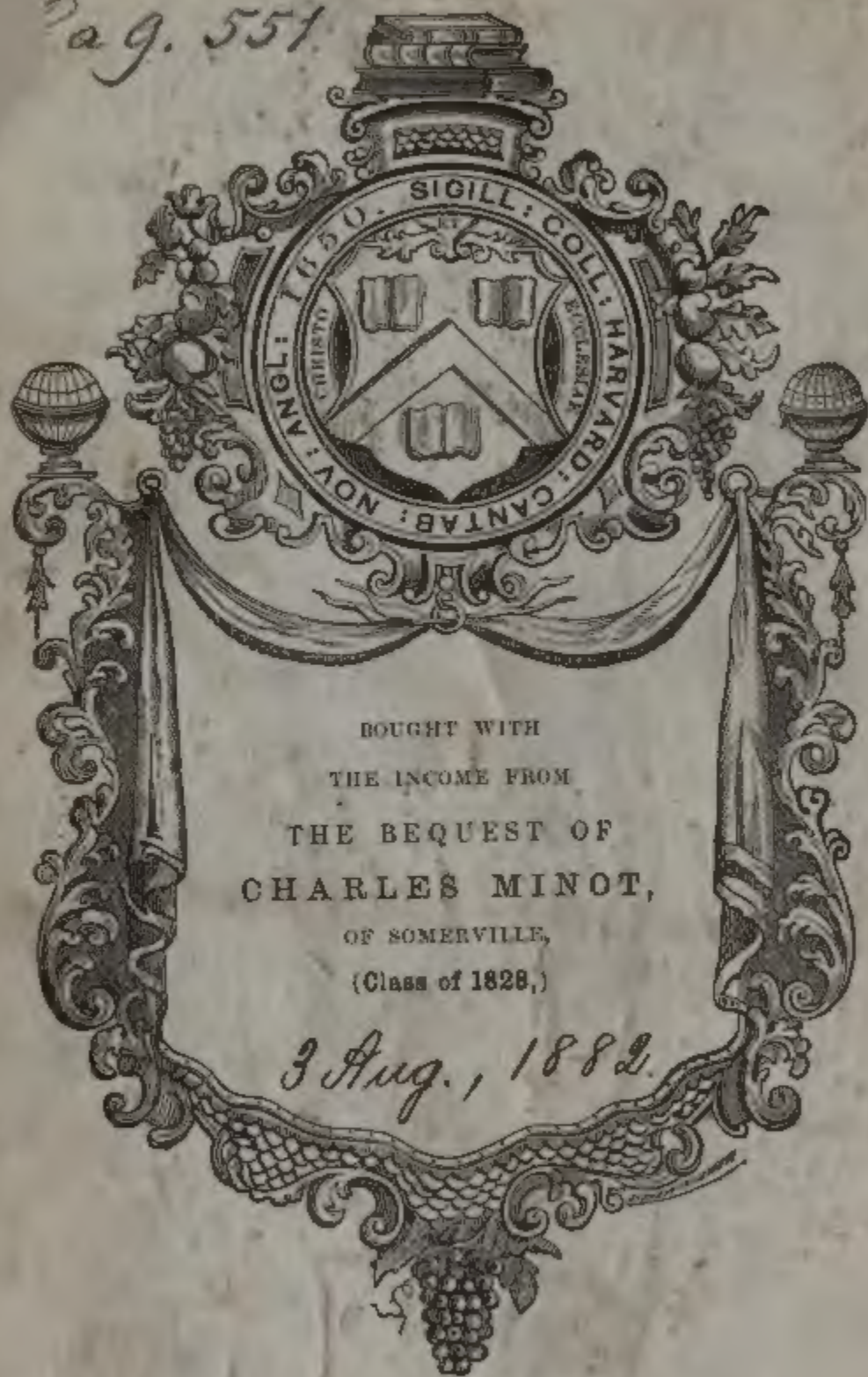
THE  
AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

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LORD CARNARVON



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BOUGHT WITH  
THE INCOME FROM  
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CHARLES MINOT,  
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# AGAMEMNON.



# AGAMEMNON.

TRANSLATED FROM ÆSCHYLUS.

*Henry Howard Esq.* BY  
THE EARL OF CARNARVON.

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## PREFACE.

IN adding one more to the many translations of this—the greatest perhaps of all ancient tragedies—it is unnecessary for me to say anything of its scope and character. This has already been done by distinguished scholars, and little remains to be accomplished in the way of annotation, conjecture, or emendation. But it is perhaps desirable that I should very briefly explain the principles which have more or less guided me in the composition of this little volume.

For the sake, too, of English readers, whose knowledge or recollections of the plot may not be quite clear, it is perhaps well to recapitulate the principal facts on which

this drama is based. The story, indeed, varies in the old Greek writers; but the legend adopted by Æschylus is briefly this:—

Atreus, king of Argos, and Thyestes were brothers, sons of Pelops and grandsons of Tantalus. Thyestes seduced the wife of his brother Atreus, who in turn drove him into banishment, but before long recalled him under the pretence of forgiveness and reconciliation, to inflict upon him the horrible retribution of a banquet, at which he was induced to eat the flesh of his own murdered children.

From this fiendish atrocity spring the long succession of crime begetting crime and the curse which is ever calling for atonement and never receiving satisfaction; and on this idea, so familiar to Greek dramatists and audiences, rests the story of this gloomy and magnificent play. In revenge for this cruelty perpetrated on his father Thyestes,

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Ægisthus seduces Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon, during his absence at the siege of Troy, and with her aid and by her hand murders Agamemnon on his return home.

The character of Ægisthus is represented as base, cowardly, treacherous; that of Agamemnon, haughty, unattractive though unsuspecting; whilst that of Clytemnestra is perhaps one of the grandest combinations of masculine capacity, lofty indifference to insult, subtle and unscrupulous resolve, that ancient or modern poetry can show.

She has often been compared to Lady Macbeth, and making due allowance for the necessary difference in the conception of classical and modern character, the comparison seems no unfair one. And as the only affection and loyalty in Lady Macbeth are given to her husband, so the only softness in Clytemnestra's character is reserved for Ægisthus.

In one passage indeed she alleges a pretext for the murder of Agamemnon in his consent to the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigeneia, at the instance of the prophet Calchas, who had declared that a virgin's blood could alone release the wind-bound fleet of the Greek heroes in the harbour of Aulis; but the pretext hardly rises in gravity to a plea of self defence. It is rather a bitter sarcasm thrown out against her murdered husband by one who is indifferent alike to its acceptance or rejection.

The reference to the fate of Iphigeneia—the omens which presage it—the exquisite description of the sacrifice, which have inspired at least two beautiful allusions in Latin and English poetry—all these are introduced as the shadows of coming events, darkening the mind of the bystanders and preparing them for the final catastrophe, rather than as offering apology or justification for Clytemnestra's act.



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The scene is laid at Argos in front of the Palace of Agamemnon in the early morning, and the Chorus consists of Argive elders, who have held the office of a Council of State during the absence of the Sovereign.

In translating into English verse this great Play, I have sought, whilst adhering as near as I could to the sense of the original, so to render the words and phrases that they should be readily understood by any ordinary English reader, assuming only that he is acquainted with the story on which the drama is founded. For this reason, where I have had to choose between an exact rendering which would be unintelligible to any but a scholar, and the freer translation which would commend itself to one wholly ignorant of Greek, I have chosen the latter.

I am therefore conscious of some occasional divergence from the original; but I have endeavoured to avoid any alteration of the general

sense, and to refrain from importing foreign ideas into the English version. My hope is that the divergence from the text, wherever it occurs, is not great, and that in spite of its imperfections there may remain enough in this translation to interest those ordinary English readers to whom, from ignorance of Greek, the literature of that wonderful language lies in a sealed book.

I have been anticipated in this work by many translators, and by some very eminent in the paths of literature. I have read many of these translations, and often with admiration; but I have sought to avoid all imitation, and I have desired not even to dwell long or closely on them, from a natural fear that some of the felicitous expressions which they contain might exercise a too great influence on my mind. As far as I am aware, this translation is, with all its defects, one for which I alone am responsible.

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With regard to the Choruses, I believe it to be simply impossible for any but a poet as great as the author of this drama himself to render them with an approach to their real force—perhaps, it may be added, that in no other language could the same ideas receive their full poetical expression at all. Independently of the obscurity of some passages, and of the poetry in other parts which is of the highest order, there is a compression of thought within a narrow compass which defies translation in anything like an equal number of words, whilst in addition to all other peculiarities there is a weird and ghostly strain running through every chorus from first to last, which gives them a character of their own, and which is far beyond reproduction or imitation.

The question whether or no the choruses when reduced to English should take a rhyming form has, I suppose, perplexed many translators. Rhymes were unknown to ancient



poetry ; their origin is to be found in Christian thought, as their subsequent history is interwoven with the life of the Christian world, and therefore their application to a Greek chorus seems to be more or less of an inconsistency. I have, however, decided to follow the example set by almost all *Æschylean* translators, and to render them in rhyming verses.

At the same time I have not invariably adhered to this rule. Thus at the close of one chorus, and in the earlier dialogue between Cassandra and the Chorus, I have employed ordinary blank verse, partly because in that portion of the dialogue the iambic was mingled with the lyrical lines, and partly because on the whole the character of the speeches seemed to me to lend itself to the longer and more regular versification. As, however, the dialogue proceeded I thought it desirable to adopt the lyrical form. I was, perhaps,

further led to my general conclusion on this subject by reflecting how few satisfactory examples there are in English poetry of lyrical but un-rhyming verse, such as those that I contemplated. In "Thalaba," whose rhythm Southey has defended in no doubtful terms, and in the "Curse of Kehama," specimens are indeed to be found worthy of high admiration ; but whatever their intrinsic merits may be they have at least this serious defect, that they have entirely failed to conciliate to themselves popular favour ; they are now barely read, and they are certainly not known as they deserve to be. In Walter Scott's "Pirate," the runes chaunted by Norna are very fine, both in poetic thought and in composition, but they are essentially Scandinavian in character, and can hardly, I think, be adopted as models for a Greek Chorus. The late Lord Lytton's translations of the Horatian Odes, supposing that they were suited to an Æschylean Chorus, are probably

not amongst the most successful works of that gifted and graceful writer; and even the famous rendering by Milton of the fifth Ode of the first Book of Horace has always seemed to me to owe more to the name of its great author than to any rhythm or melody of its own.

Conscious, therefore, of the hopeless difficulties inherent in the task, not less than of my own imperfect mode of attempting it, I have accepted rather than adopted the old and conventional form.

I scarcely know if I ought to apologize for my use of the Latin names of the Divinities, when the distinct tendency of recent translators is towards the Greek and unquestionably the more correct nomenclature. I am of course aware that the Greek Zeus and the Latin Jupiter express to a scholar entirely different ideas. It is possible that the day may come when an average English reader

may be sensible of the distinction; but that time is as yet distant, and whilst Zeus represents nothing to him, Jupiter does convey some notion, though often an inexact and imperfect one. Even Mr. Grote—addressing himself to students and scholars—thought it necessary to preface his History of Greece by a glossary of Latin equivalents in explanation of the Greek names which he has used.

Milton not only uses those Latin equivalents but places them occasionally side by side with the Greek names. So again Pope. He wrote before the days of these finer distinctions of modern criticism, but the absence of them in his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* has not injuriously affected that great work; and I feel sure that Lord Derby's spirited translation has gained by the use of the Latin and more familiar nomenclature.

It is of course a choice of difficulties; and one difficulty in connection with this question I

may perhaps instance in the rendering of the word "Até." It plays a remarkable part in the greatest Greek dramas, and it represents one of the grandest, most sombre, and most poetical of all the ideas of Greek Mythology. But it has no precise equivalent in Latin, and, though the word is consecrated by Shakspeare, the idea is without a real counterpart in English. The word itself in this very Play is used in several distinct senses; sometimes as the ancestral curse, sometimes as the Fiend who presides over the fortunes of the House, sometimes as the frenzy which leads men to the commission of crime, and sometimes as the woe which is the result of that crime. I have thought it best to express the value of these different meanings as I best might, without confining myself to the use of a particular word which would seem of necessity to an English reader to carry with it one single idea.

I ought perhaps to add that I have generally

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followed Dindorf's text, and have refrained from foot-notes in explanation of the particular renderings which in doubtful passages I have adopted. I may, however, say that I have had a reason—whether sufficient or not others must judge—for such renderings.

With these few observations I must commit to the winds and waves of possible criticism this slight attempt to render into English a very great and noble drama. That it has been written during the fugitive moments of a scanty leisure, and that it has undergone far less revision and correction than was its due, are, I am aware, no excuses for its many imperfections ; that it has been a source of great pleasure to me, associating itself with solitary walks and railway journeys, is perhaps a better reason—but be the justification what it may, I can only now submit it as an insignificant and humble offering to the memory of that old University teaching, which, whatever may be the troubles

of private or the controversies of public life, loses none of its charm as men grow older, and to which I at least shall always cling with grateful affection.

C.

*March, 1879.*



## PERSONS REPRESENTED.

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AGAMEMNON, *King of Argos.*

ÆGISTHUS, *Cousin to Agamemnon.*

CHORUS of Argive Elders.

HERALD.

WATCHMAN.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *Wife to Agamemnon.*

CASSANDRA, *Daughter to King Priam.*

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SCENE.—*Argos, in front of Agamemnon's Palace.*

TIME.—*Early morning.*



# AGAMEMNON.

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WATCHMAN.

YEAR after year and night on night I keep  
On the Atreidæ's roof, like house-dog true,  
My weary watch and scan the host of heaven—  
Bright powers that shine along the sky, and bring  
Or summer's heat or winter's cold to men—  
Craving the Gods some respite of my toil.  
And still I watch to see the beacon's blaze  
Redden the sky and tell the welcome tale  
That Troy is fallen. So wills my mistress—She  
Who in men's counsels bears no woman's heart.  
And when upon this couch of mine I lie  
Wet with the dews of night, and close my eyes,  
'Tis but a fitful and a feverish rest,  
Unbless'd by dreams and scared by things of  
dread.

Or if like sentry on my round I strive  
With idle song to wile the weary hours,  
Comes o'er my mind the boding sense of ill,  
The altered fortunes of this Royal House.  
Shine forth then, blessed harbinger of good,  
And bring us rest. Ye Gods! it surely shines,  
Bright torch of night, making our darkness day,  
Speeding in gladsome Argos feast and dance.  
Swift to Atreides' wife the glorious news  
I'll bear, and bid her rise, and through these  
halls

Raise the loud song of triumph for the fall  
Of Troy—if Troy indeed be overthrown—  
As seems the fiery messenger to say.

And I will tread the prelude of the dance,  
For that by some shrewd cast of Fortune's die  
I marked the signal of my lord's success.  
May I be first to grasp his gracious hand!—  
No more—my lips in silence close are sealed,  
But had these walls a voice, methinks they'd  
say,

How fain I'd speak to those who know my thought,  
And silence keep to those who yet know nought.

## CHORUS.

Ten years have come and gone since when  
The two great chiefs of Atreus' race,  
Ordained of Jove and Kings of men,  
A royal pair in power and place,  
Marshalled their thousand ships and more,  
And sailing from their native shore,  
Led forth to war the Greek array,  
Loud clamouring for the battle fray.  
So when their nest has lost its young,

    The parent vultures rend the air,  
And borne on pinion fierce and strong  
    Circle above the plundered lair.

But far away and far above,  
Touch'd with compassion's gracious love,  
Jove or Pan or just Apollo  
Hearkens to their wailing cry  
For these outcasts of the sky,  
And sends the avenging fate ;  
Which, however slow and late,  
Fails not upon guilt to follow.

So Jove, the sovereign guardian of the household  
    hearth and shrine,

Hath sent the two Atreidæ upon guilty Paris'  
line,  
And many a knee shall dusty be in the struggle  
and the strife,  
And many a spear shall shivered be for that un-  
faithful wife.

But what is, is ; and Fate's decree  
Bringeth to pass whate'er must be :  
Nor offering nor tearful wail,  
Nor penitence,\* shall aught avail  
To pacify those Maidens stern  
Before whose shrines no fires burn.  
But we whose youth long since is spent,  
Propping on staves our bodies bent,  
Lag here behind the armament.  
The old and young alone are left,  
The land of its defence is reft ;  
For strength of child is all the same  
As weakness in the aged frame.

\* I understand the allusion to be to Iphigeneia rather than the violated rites of hospitality by Paris.

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And so, when manhood's leaf decays,  
And bending o'er his staff with pain  
The old man treads life's downward ways,  
Age is like childhood come again,  
Or some day-dream that never stays—  
But Clytemnestra, royal Queen,  
    Daughter of Tyndarus, declare  
What these sacrifices mean,  
    Why the incense loads the air.  
The Gods who round our city stand,  
Who guard our market-place and land,  
The Gods who dwell in Heav'n's high sphere,  
The Gods who rule the shades below,  
See with rich gifts their altars glow;  
While streaming upward far and near,  
Fed with unguents soft and clear,  
From the inmost royal store,  
Sacred fires heavenward soar.  
    Then, lady, say whate'er is well  
For you to say and me to hear,  
And soothe the dim and anxious fear,  
Sometimes seeming in my ear  
To ring a weird and boding knell;



Sometimes, as the holy incense  
And the sacrifice's influence  
Fill my mind with other strain,  
Giving place to hope again.

Yes—I can tell the fateful signs the Grecian host  
befell,

What time the heroes 'gan their march. Old as I  
am, the spell

Of heav'nly trust inspires the song congenial to  
my age—

How erst the royal princes twain went forth the  
war to wage,

And marching on with glittering spear and with  
avenging brand,

They led the flower of Grecia's youth against the  
Trojan land.

But them with this dread omen the King of birds  
did greet,

Them on their way, the two kings, who ruled our  
Grecian fleet;

For hard beside the palace, in a clear and cloudless  
sky,

Two eagles on the right hand men could easily  
descry.

Of this dread pair the one was black as night;

The other showed behind a plumage white;

But foully feasting both did rend and tear,

Her labours done,

Her last course run,

Great with young, a luckless hare.

The burden of my song shall be a woe and wail:

But in the end of ends the good shall still prevail.

The wise Seer understood and knew

What meant the sights within his view—

The leaders mustering for the fight,

The savage feeders on the hare,

And the Atreidæ twain,

Of common birth, of equal might,

In mould and mind a different pair—

And thus he spoke in prescient strain:

“Priam’s town and haughty towers,

“Rich in wealth and royal state,

“Veil to your embattled powers,

“And in time shall yield to Fate.

“ But when at last

“ On Troy is cast

“ The curb that’s forged for courser wild,

“ May Heaven to us be good and mild.

“ For Dian, goddess chaste and fair,

“ Compassionates the wretched hare,

“ Compassionates her helpless brood,

“ Fiercely torn and rent for food

“ By the winged hounds of Jove.

“ Loathing the eagle’s cruel chase,

“ Wroth at the royal house and race,

“ To us the goddess bears no love.

“ The burden of my song shall be a woe and wail :

“ But in the end of ends the good shall still prevail.

“ Yes—gentle is that goddess fair

“ To every helpless tender brood ;

“ E’en the young lions know her care,

“ In dewy mead or tangled wood :

“ And She her mighty sire entreats, that He

“ Will turn to good the doubtful augury.

“ God of healing, thee I pray,

“ Thy dear Sister’s wrath to stay,

“ Pray Her that there be not sent

“On our Grecian armament,  
“Gales tempestuous, contrary,  
“Blowing inland from the sea.  
“Pray that no fresh sacrifice,  
“Impious, loathsome, shock our eyes,  
“Fruitful worker of dread strife,  
“Setting war ’twixt man and wife.  
“Yes—the wrath of Heav’n undying  
    “Ever constant shall remain,  
“Lurking in the House, and crying,  
“Vengeance for a daughter slain.”

Such the fateful strain and measure,  
Heard with mingled grief and pleasure,  
Drawn from way-side bird and presage,  
To our Kings rang out the message.  
So Calchas spake, the gifted Seer,  
And in his words I seem to hear,  
Like burden of a song, a constant woe and wail;  
Though in the end of ends the good shall still  
    prevail.

Mighty Jove, whoe’er thou art,  
By whatsoever name addrest,

To thee alone I give my heart,  
On thee my cares and burdens rest.  
The earliest born who ruled in Heaven,  
Mighty of strength, has past and gone;  
Who followed next in turn was driven  
From his realm outcast, undone.  
But those who hymn aright Jove's praise,  
Shall attain their heart's desire—  
Jove, who guides men's faltering ways,  
And by suffering leads them higher.  
So comes o'er sleeping eyes the memory of  
pain;  
Comes o'er th' unwilling mind wisdom's persuasive  
strain:  
And on their ever holy seats the blest Gods sit, and  
school  
The hearts of men to reverence by stern com-  
pulsion's rule.

Then spake the elder of the twain,  
But not to murmur or complain;  
Though the Seer said the words of doom,  
Though Fortune darkened round in gloom;

What time the Grecian fleet by stress  
Of wind and wave lay motionless,  
Where Aulis hears the ceaseless roar  
Of surges on the Eubœan shore.  
From Strymon's banks the Thracian gale  
Blew fiercely, rending rope and sail,  
And bearing in their dismal train,  
Delays and famine, waste and pain;  
Till, sickening o'er their hopes delayed,  
The flower of our host 'gan fade.  
Dread was that gale: but dreader still  
When pealing forth his words of ill,  
In Dian's name his doom the Seer  
Proclaimed, and e'en the Chieftains twain  
Smote on the ground, nor could restrain  
For anguish sore the unbidden tear.

Then spake the elder King that day,  
"Woe's me if I do not obey;  
"Woe too if at the altar side  
"I slay my child, my flower and pride,  
"And in her blood my hands imbrue!  
"What shall I leave undone? What do?  
"How shall I fail my comrades true?

“For well they know a virgin’s blood  
“These winds alone can lull to rest.  
“For this they crave. Perchance ’twere good  
“To hearken to their stern behest.”  
So spake he with a wavering mind.  
But when he once had bowed to Fate,  
Came o’er his soul, like change of wind,  
A spirit base and insensate.  
For frenzy, when it stirs the brain,  
Counsels to deeds of wrong and bane ;  
And desperate daring swells the train.  
And so he willed to sacrifice  
His only daughter, as the price  
    Of favouring gale  
    To spread his sail,  
And vict’ry in the avenging strife  
Waged for the sake of faithless wife.  
Each warrior chief looked on—small care,  
Methinks, had they for cry and prayer,  
Or for her young and maiden life.  
And he, her sire, to whom she prayed,  
Bade her with solemn chaunt be laid,  
Like kid, upon the altar-stone,



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Swathed in her robes from foot to crown,  
And guard her mouth lest cry or moan  
Upon the House bring curses down.

And silently and piteously  
In saffron robe that swept the ground,  
She passed along with glance of eye  
Smiting each priest that stood around ;  
Beauteous as tho' by limner's art portrayed,  
And tho' to silence bound she oft to speak essayed.

For she of yore was wont with song  
To cheer her sire, his guests among,  
And with her young and virgin voice  
Greet him, and bid him to rejoice,  
When he the wine-cup high had filled—  
What followed then 'tis not for me  
To say. The deed I did not see.  
The arts of Calchas were fulfilled.  
Yet justice wills that men should learn  
The fruit of sin by suffering stern,  
Though idle would the forecast be  
That strove to pierce futurity :  
To know what fate doth hold in store  
Were adding to our griefs one more.

Come then fair tidings with the breaking day,  
As swift and gladsome as the morn. So say  
We, the sole remnants of the Argive band,  
The sole defenders of our native land.

*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hail, Clytemnestra—meet it is to pay  
Our heart-felt homage to thy royal worth,  
And to do honour to a wife, whose Lord  
Is absent far from home and kingly realm :  
Say what thy tidings, and what joyful hopes  
Have made these altars smoke. Fain would I  
hear,  
Yet can I bear to be denied my wish.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Yes—may the morn, as saith the adage old,  
Be child of night and herald of good news !  
List then a tale of joy beyond thy hopes,  
Thy utmost hopes—the Greeks are lords of Troy.

CHORUS.

Troy ! Can it be ? I scarce believe thy words.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I say that Troy is ours—speak I not plain ?

CHORUS.

O joy of joys—rises th' unbidden tear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, never blush. That tear doth prove thee friend.

CHORUS.

But say, what warrant for this wondrous tale ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Warrant enough—unless some God deceives.

CHORUS.

Was it some tempting vision of the night ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, 'twas no fancy of a drowsy soul.

CHORUS.

Dost feed thy mind on some unfledged report ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Mock'st thou, as though I were some foolish girl?

CHORUS.

When did Troy fall?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This very night it fell—  
This night that now is brightening to the dawn.

CHORUS.

Who brought these tidings with a herald's speed?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It is the beacon fire on Ida's crest  
By flaming convoys that hath brought the news.  
From Ida's woods to the Hermæan crag  
Of Lemnos—then from Lemnos to the heights  
Of Athos—Athos consecrate to Jove—  
Passed the broad brand of flame. Then towering  
    high  
And gathering strength, e'en as it sped its  
    course,

It spanned the sea, and, like a golden sun,  
Flashed its red glow athwart Macistus' cliffs.  
And there the watchman, watching not in vain,  
Wrought at his labour till Euripus' flood  
Reddened again, and by Messapian towers,  
Heaping the beacon high with withered heath,  
His comrades saw and sped the message on.  
Then without stop or stay, nor yet bedimmed,  
Like a bright moon, the flaming herald flew  
Over Asopus' plain, and wakened up  
Fresh fiery signals on Cithæron's rock.  
Nor did the watchman on that distant height  
Refuse the flaming message sent from far ;  
But sped it on till, blazing yet more high,  
It swooped on the Gorgopian lake and climbed  
The cliffs of Ægiplanctus, warning wide  
To heap the bale-fire with unstinting hand.  
And then rekindled, in unbroken might,  
Swept the huge beard of flame, and soared above  
The headland which looks down upon the waves  
Of the Saronic gulf, and thence once more  
It flashed upon the Arachnæan cliffs  
And the watch-towers that near the City stand,

Till on the Atreidæ's roof it lighted last,  
Claiming descent from Ida's far-off fires.

So have I ordered the succession due,  
As in a torch race, where each man in turn  
Receives from other ; and the first and last  
Is deemed victorious. Now thou hast the proof  
Of the news sent me by my lord from Troy.

CHORUS.

Unto the Gods my due thanks shall be given  
Hereafter : now I fain would hear again  
The tale which fell so sweetly on my ears.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This day—this very day the Grecian host  
Is within captured Troy. And there, methinks,  
No doubtful cry is ringing through the town.  
Pour oil and acid in the self-same vase,  
They'll blend as soon in friendly unison  
As the stern victors and the vanquished foes.  
Yes ; you may hear the cry of each distinct—  
A double horror—and in fancy see  
How sire and son and kinsman high are heaped

Each on the other, whilst the captives round  
Mourn for their dear ones who shall ne'er return.  
And in their midst the conquering bands of Greece,  
All rank and order for the time forgot,  
Famished with toil and blood, through the dark hours  
Hold their rude revel, with scant rule or form.  
No need for them to keep their watch beneath  
The open vault of heaven 'mid frost and dew:  
In Trojan homes they dwell; and free from care  
They sleep unguarded through the livelong night.  
Yet in their triumph let them mind to pay  
Due reverence to every God and shrine  
Of captured Troy—and so shall they escape  
The doom of conquerors conquered in their turn.  
Woe worth the day if some unhallowed lust  
Or greed of spoil enthrall that host—who, like  
Some runner in the race, can only win  
A safe return by running back his course.  
If Heaven's displeasure light upon our arms,  
The dead men's curse will surely wake, e'en if  
No fresh disaster fall. Hear then my words,  
Albeit a woman's; and may good prevail—  
As I, methinks, have had my share of good.

## CHORUS.

Lady, thy speech, like prudent Counsellor's,  
Lends to these tokens confirmation sure ;  
And I, in full assurance of their truth,  
Will raise my voice and bless the Gods for this,  
The glorious meed of toils and perils past.

Sovereign Jove and friendly Shade  
Of Night, by whose propitious aid  
War's bright triumphs now are ours,  
And o'er Troy's embattled towers  
The meshes of a net are cast,  
Fate-enwoven close and fast,  
So that in its mighty fold  
Are wrapped alike both young and old—  
Jove, my Lord, I reverence thee,  
Great God of hospitality.  
Straight on perjured Paris thou  
Didst long since direct thy bow ;  
And thy shaft went surely home,  
When the fated hour was come.  
Jove hath struck the appointed blow—  
This we surely see and know :  
He hath brought in very deed



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That to pass which he decreed.

In foolishness the fool once said,  
No heed the Gods to sinners paid.  
'Twas idly said. In wrath divine  
On sire to son through long-drawn line—  
When war is waged with impious hate,  
And hoarded wealth is all too great—

The awful Gods stand forth confess'd.  
For me with humbler thoughts possess'd,  
In prudence and sobriety,  
May my lot be from sorrow free.

Idle are the fence and shield  
Which wealth's treasure-houses yield  
To the sinner who has striven,  
In wantonness of heart malign,  
To raise his heel against the shrine  
Where Justice sits beloved of Heaven.

By Persuasion—Goddess dread,  
Eldest born of Fate—misled,  
Evil counsels now prevailing,  
Mortal help all unavailing,  
To his doom he headlong goes.  
Say not that Guilt hidden lies :

It burns, it glares in baleful guise,  
And like baser metal shows  
Its nature darkened and defiled.  
E'en so in thoughtless sport the child  
His painted flying bird pursuing,  
Brings on his home and people ruin.

Too late he prays. Idle his prayers shall fall,  
The sinner perishes beyond recall.

So came unto the Atreidæ's roof Troy's young and  
treacherous lord,

And stole away his host's fair wife and wronged the  
friendly board.

And lightly through the gates she passed, leaving  
to kith and kin

The curse of deadly spear and shield, the heritage  
of sin,

And strife of men and gathering ships. Daring  
and rash went she,

Bearing to Troy a wedding gift of death and misery.

Then in words of prophecy,  
Mingled with a wailing cry,  
Oft repeated, wild and drear,  
Rose the chaunt of Priest and Seer.

“Woe for the Royal House ; woe for the marriage  
bed ;

“Woe for the wife whose love is lost, whose steps  
are fled :

“Woe for the chiefs ;—foremost for him, and chief  
of all,

“Dishonoured, uncomplaining, silent in his hall.

“He scarce believes that she in truth has fled  
across the main,

“Though in her place for love of her a phantom  
seems to reign.

“Yes—for the love of her the statue’s grace is  
gone,

“And from the sightless eyes the light of love is  
flown.

“In the wandering dreams of night

“Fantasies oft meet his sight,

“Dreams which in their birth are dying,

“Human wit and strength defying,

“Flitting on wings that never come again,

“Adown the paths of Sleep’s eternal reign.”

Woes like these, nor these alone,

Brood beside our home’s hearth-stone,

Whilst in every Argive dwelling  
Grief its bitter tale is telling,  
For the dear sake of those who went  
Forth with the Grecian armament.  
Those who went forth to war return  
No more to us ; but in their room  
The hero dust and funeral urn  
Are sadly borne to their last home.  
The God who rules war's usury,  
Changing life to ashes dry,  
Who holds the scale with even hand  
In the rude shock of spear and brand,  
Sends from Troy's war-wasted plains  
A few scorched and scanty grains,  
Relics of each gallant wight,  
Stored in urn, who fell in fight.  
And loud the cry goes up for him,  
The strong of heart, the stout of limb ;  
Or him, the warrior skilled in strife,  
Who perished for another's wife.  
And round and round,  
With hateful sound,  
The envious whispers come and go,

---

And wrath and bitterness and woe

'Gainst the Atreidæ twain ;

For those who in a foreign grave

Take their last rest—the young and brave,

All in their beauty slain.

Mingled with curses deep and loud,

The tale is passed from man to man ;

And still my longing grows to scan

What the blind caves of night do shroud.

The jealous Gods are swift to mark

The man of blood ; the Furies dark

Swift to hurl him to disgrace

From his pitch of power and place.

Passeth strength and fadeth bloom,

In the land of endless gloom.

Praise that doth the mean transcend,

Leadeth men to fatal end.

Who can bear the scorching rays

Flashing from Jove's angry gaze ?

Be mine a lot of tranquil ease,

Such as will no God displease ;

No sack or spoil of town I crave,

I pray to wear no chain of slave.

The beacons blaze, and through the city speeds  
A swift and joyous tale—who knows if true,  
Or if it be some heaven-commissioned lie?  
But dull of heart and childish would he be  
Who at the flash of some wild signal fire  
Kindling to ecstasy, should on the change  
Of the glad tidings faint and fall away.  
'Tis woman's temper to believe in joy  
Ere it hath come—swift move her thoughts, and  
    swift  
Passes away the tale her tongue has told.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Enough—we soon shall hear whether or no  
These bright relays of beacon fires have told  
A truthful tale; or, like some pleasing dream,  
The phantom light has but beguiled our minds.  
Fast from the shore speeds hitherward a man,  
Herald of news, dusty and olive-crowned;  
And from his lips a surer tale we'll learn  
Than from the smoke and flame of beacon  
    lights.  
Either fair news he brings, or—but I loathe

To forecast evil.—May good fortune send  
To fair beginnings a yet fairer end!

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

CHORUS.

So too say I; and ill betide that man  
Who breathes a different prayer.

*Enter* HERALD.

HERALD.

Hail to thee, hail,

My native soil, my own dear Argive land!  
Ten years of exile, and of many hopes  
Made shipwreck, this alone is mine—  
What ne'er I dreamt of -to lie down and die  
On my loved Argive soil! Wherefore once more  
Hail to thee, Earth, hail to thee, blessed Sun,  
Hail, highest Jove, and thou too, Pythian King!  
Whilom thy shafts fell thick amidst our ranks,  
And by Scamander's stream thou wroughtest woe  
Unmeasured. Now Apollo, gracious Lord,  
Save us and grant us from our toils release.  
Whom shall I turn to next? My country's Gods?  
Or thee my Patron, glorious Mercury,  
Herald divine, whom mortal heralds love?



Or the blest Dead, who sent us forth to war,  
And now receive the remnants of our host ?  
Ah me !—what joy to see once more these dear,  
These royal halls, this awful judgment seat,  
These holy statues facing towards the sun.  
If ever in old time with welcome look  
Ye hailed your Lord coming in royal state,  
Receive him now, bringing for you and all  
Light to the darkness of our troubled thoughts—  
Agamemnon, who like rugged labourer  
In Jove's stern service toiling, has hewn down  
Troy and her altars and her temple shrines,  
And wasted all her fruitful fields of corn.  
Yes—he has cast his yoke on Troy, and comes  
Girt round with honours and with Fortune's gifts,  
Foremost of living men : nor Paris, nor  
His guilty country dare to boast their crime  
Outweighs the forfeit and the penalty.  
For rightly judged and convict found of theft,  
He sought in vain deliverance from his deed,  
And, like the mower mowing in the fields,  
Laid level with the ground his father's house.  
Twice o'er sin's wage have Priam's children paid.

CHORUS.

We bid thee welcome, coming from our host.

HERALD.

So welcome, I am well content to die.

CHORUS.

What! has the love of home tried thee so sore?

HERALD.

Yes, my eyes swim with tears of heartfelt joy.

CHORUS.

That were, methinks, a pleasant cause of grief.

HERALD.

Speak clearly, friend—I do not read thy words.

CHORUS.

We yearned for those who yearned in turn for us.

HERALD.

Did then our country crave for our return?

CHORUS.

Yes—oft with gloomy and foreboding mind.

HERALD.

But why such boding fear upon the land ?

CHORUS.

When times are out of joint, silence is best.

HERALD.

What ! when our kings were absent, did ye fear ?

CHORUS.

E'en as you said I could have wished to die.

HERALD.

'Tis well that endeth well. For in man's life  
The diverse good and ill commingled are ;  
And who, beside the blessed Gods, are free  
From sorrow through all time ? I could recount  
How on the sea we toiled and roughly fared,  
Scarce putting to the shore, and every day  
Teemed with fresh suffering as our constant lot.

But on the land yet sorer was our toil:  
We spread our couch hard by the foemen's walls,  
The dews from heaven and the long meadow grass,  
Stood thick on hair and raiment--but why tell  
Of winter's frost smiting the fowls of air,  
When Ida's snow was deep, or summer's heat  
When the broad sea as on a noontide couch  
By wave or wind unruffled lay asleep?  
Why tell of this and grieve? 'Tis past, all past,  
As with the dead who shall arise no more.  
Why should the living for the dead make moan?  
Why tell the tale of those who fell in fight?  
Nay, rather, we, the remnant of the host,  
To our long griefs now bid a long farewell,  
And flying glorious over land and main,  
Full in the face of Heaven we boast, that we  
The spoils of Troy to the great Gods of Greece  
For endless time here consecrate and vow.  
Let then the People hear, and hearing bless  
The State and our commanders, and proclaim  
All praise to Jove who wrought this wondrous  
    deed.  
My say is said.

## CHORUS.

By it I am convinced;  
For age is ever young enough to learn.  
But welcome most, I ween, will be thy news  
To Clytemnestra and the Royal House.

*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

When the first beacon broke upon the night  
With the glad tidings of Troy's overthrow,  
I raised a cry of joy—and one who stood  
Hard by, in chiding words thus spake to me :  
“Deem'st thou, in faith of these wild signal-fires,  
“That Troy is overthrown? 'Tis easy, sure,  
“To raise a woman's hopes.” To such a one  
I seemed in sooth to dream; yet not the less  
I offered up my sacrifice of thanks :  
And now in woman's fashion through the town  
Men raise their cry of joy, and bless the Gods  
With grateful hymns and fragrant altar-fires.  
What need of more? From Agamemnon's self  
I soon shall hear the truth; and meanwhile I  
As best I may will welcome back my Lord.

What brighter radiance of created things  
Can bless the vision of a loving wife,  
Who in the open gateway stands to greet  
Her Lord returning from war's dread alarms ?  
Go then, and bid Him, whom his People love  
Hasten to come ; and coming he shall find  
By his hearth-side his wife, like watch-dog true,  
All love to him, all terror to his foes ;  
Such as he left her, and in all things like,  
Guarding th' unbroken signet of her trust.  
Sooner shall brass receive the colour's dye,  
Than my fair name be stained with calumny.

HERALD.

A noble boast in sooth for noble dame.

CHORUS.

Aye, for her words are clear and shrewdly said.  
But tell me, Herald, comes he with the host ?  
Comes Menelaus our beloved prince ?

HERALD.

I dare not lie even to please my friend.

CHORUS.

My heart misgives me that the solemn truth  
Stands far aloof from what we most desire.

HERALD.

The hero with his bark hath passed away  
From out the Grecian host. Thou hast the truth.

CHORUS.

Was it in sailing from the shores of Troy  
Full in the gaze of men? or midst his friends  
Did some swift storm-wrack sweep him from their  
sight?

HERALD.

Yes—thy few words the mournful tale have told.  
Like skilful archer thou hast hit the mark.

CHORUS.

What say the seamen? Make they no report,  
Whether he perished or perchance survives?

HERALD.

No eye has seen save the far-seeing Sun,  
By whose sustaining beams all nature lives.



## CHORUS.

And was it then the wrath of Heaven which sent  
This fatal tempest on our armament?

## HERALD.

Let no untoward speech profane to-day  
Our happiness. Each God of mirth or gloom  
Hath his own hour when men should give him  
praise.

When some sad-visaged messenger brings home  
Tidings of broken armies, private woes,  
Or public wounds that pierce a country's heart,  
And men made homeless by the two-fold scourge—  
That bloody, barbed curse so dear to Mars—  
Methinks that then the bearer of such news  
To the dread Furies should pour forth his song.  
But he who bears the tidings of great joy  
To a rejoicing and acclaiming town,  
How can he dash their mirth or bear to tell  
The tempest-laden anger of the Gods?  
For Sea and Fire that 'erst were deadly foes,  
Conspired in solemn covenant to bring  
Our fated host to ruin. Wind and wave

Arose tumultuous ; and through the night  
Drove ship on ship, till in the blinding spray  
And the mad tempest's rage they passed from  
sight.

But when the daylight came, full in our view  
Th' Ægean bloomed, like some rich garden plot,  
With men and wrecks and relics tempest-strown.  
Ourselves—our bark—how we escaped 'tis hard  
To say. 'Twas, sure, some God, no mortal man,  
Stood at the helm and stole us from the storm.  
For saving Fortune sat upon our bark,  
And when we reached the haven of our rest,  
Kept us from breaking surge and rock-bound shore.  
Yet in the glow and sunshine of new life,  
While scarce believing that the seething hell  
Of angry waters we had 'scaped, once more  
We seemed to chew the bitter cud of grief,  
When we bethought us sadly of our friends  
Scattered like dust across the storm-beat main.  
But if among them there are those who live,  
They doubtless deem that we have perished, as  
We deem them dead. Why not? May all end  
well ;

And first and chief may Menelaus come !  
For if he lives—if still the Sun's bright eye  
Surveys him, and if Jove consents to spare  
The Royal race, good hope there is that he  
May once more see his home. My tale is told.

## CHORUS.

Who was it in the distant days,  
Far beyond man's ken or gaze,  
Named her Helen ?\* and whence came  
The inspired prophetic name ?  
Bride of the Spear and cause of strife,  
Fatal name to human life,  
Fatal name to captured town,  
To navies lost, to hosts o'erthrown.  
Forth from her dainty bower she passed upon the  
seas,  
And spread her sail to catch the earth-born Zephyr's  
breeze ;

\* The play upon the name of Helen in the original seems to me—  
with every deference to those who have attempted to imitate it in  
English—unfortunate and impracticable. I agree with Dean Milman's  
observations on this subject at page 36 of his fine translation, and venture  
to think that he need not have feared to adhere to his own view.

And fast like huntsmen on the track—the viewless  
track of oars—

Her armed pursuers came to land by Simois’  
woody shores.

Woe for the bloody strife! woe for the wrath  
divine

Which brought the marriage curse on Troy and  
Priam’s line!

Claiming vengeance for the evil done to Jove our  
Sovereign Lord,

Lord and ever-watchful guardian of the hospitable  
board—

Vengeance from her Trojan kinsmen, who unheed-  
ful of the wrong,

All too quickly, all too lightly hymned the fatal  
marriage song.

But Priam’s ancient town in ruin

Learns to-day a different strain,

Learns from her citizens’ undoing,

Guilty Paris to arraign.

So once a lion’s cub was reared

With kindly nurture; tame and mild,

Gentle to aged man and child,

---

Like foster-son he came at call,  
Fondled and loved. But soon appeared  
The instincts of his nature wild,  
A curse unto the friendly hall.  
Then his nurture ill-requiting,  
On men and flocks in turn alighting,  
Fell the ravening beast of prey.  
And the house was stained with blood,  
As when some infernal brood  
Of curses grow and cling and stay  
In some friendly man's abode.  
E'en so there seemed to come on Troy  
The spirit of a breathless calm,  
A dream of beauty and of joy,  
Revealing in her eyes the charm  
Of tender grace and piercing fire,  
And conquering bloom of soft desire.

Fatal neighbour, cruel guest,  
Hapless bride, domestic pest,  
To the sons of Priam, she,  
Claiming hospitality,  
Came commissioned to fulfil  
Her marriage curse of grief and ill.

So once 'twas said in times of yore,  
"Great happiness can never die,  
"Or pass away like childless sire  
"Without result or progeny ;  
"But endless sorrows shoot and spring  
"Out of Fortune's blossoming."

But I believe unholy deed  
Bears ever true and kindred seed,  
Whilst in the dwellings of the just arise  
Fair children and illustrious destinies.

But in the unrighteous home,  
An ancient wrong begets a worse,  
And, when the appointed hour shall come,  
That worse shall yet again beget  
Of its own kind, most dread in fight,  
Arrogant and foe to light,  
In the dark halls where far from sight  
Broods the hereditary curse.

But Justice marks the blameless lot ;  
She shines within the smoke-dimm'd cot,  
And ever as she turns her eyes  
From glittering gawd or golden prize,  
And lightly recks of power or cause

Stamped with a counterfeit applause,  
With an unerring aim she bends  
Man's fate to its appointed ends.

*Enter AGAMEMNON with CASSANDRA.*

Welcome, proud conqueror, Atreus' son,  
How shall I fittingly, monarch, address thee?  
How in my prayers shall I honour and bless thee,  
Truthfully telling forth what thou hast done?

Ah me! full many a man doth feign  
Friendship he does not know,  
And counterfeits a joy or pain  
In others' weal or woe,  
Or makes his cheerless lips to wear  
A smile that has no true place there—  
But he who reads men's hearts aright,  
Knows the dissembler at first sight:  
And, sooth to say, in days of yore,  
What time our host went forth to war,  
I loved thee not; and took it ill  
When, in thy stern imperious will,  
Thou sentest men to bleed and die  
Forth from their homes unwillingly.



But now thy words ring well and true  
To those who gallantly, and through  
The toils of war, their way have won.  
Now thou shalt learn what each has done  
By unwise rule or sage command,  
Whilst thou wert absent from the land.

## AGAMEMNON.

To Argos first and to its native Gods,  
Through whom I wrought the vengeance upon Troy,  
By whom I now return—to Them I pay  
My greeting. At their bar the cause of Troy,  
Though not by mortal pleaders, was discussed.  
Of the two urns, in one the votes were cast  
For sack and slaughter; o'er the other vase,  
Empty and void, Hope faltered in her flight.  
The storms of Fate yet rage, and the fresh smoke  
And reeking embers of the conquered town  
Send up to heaven their thick and fragrant cloud.  
For these their crowning mercies let us thank  
The Gods, by whose high favour we have snared  
Within our toils proud Ilium, and have seen  
The Monster-horse, laden with armed folk,

About the setting of the Pleiades,  
Spring like a ravening lion o'er the walls,  
And lap its fill of princely blood. So much  
As to the Gods. For thee I know thy worth,  
Unlike the herd who know not how to give  
Ungrudging honour to the prosperous.  
Upon their heart a cankerous envy sits,  
Doubling the burden of their discontent  
For their own woes and for their neighbour's weal.  
I know how poor a thing is friendship—  
A mirrored form, a shadow of a shade.  
Only Ulysses, who reluctant sailed—  
Who knows if still he lives?—like some stout horse  
Strained at the yoke and laboured in my cause.  
Meanwhile, if aught there be yet unresolved,  
Touching the State or worship of the Gods,  
In full assembly we will counsel take,  
To give to that which standeth right and true  
Sure confirmation ; but where disease hath gone  
Down to the core, there fearless with the knife  
Or burning iron to root out the plague.  
But my first greeting in these hallowed halls  
Is to the blessed Gods who sent me forth,

And now have granted me a safe return  
May Vict'ry, that has never left my side,  
Be my abiding and my constant guide!

*Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have no shame, grave citizens of Argos,  
In making known to you the love I bear  
Unto my husband: for there comes a time  
When speech grows bold—and thus I dare to tell  
At the untutored bidding of my mind,  
How sad a life was mine when he was gone.  
Yes—sad it is for any wife to sit  
All lonely in her home and list the tales  
Of varying evil, each worse than the last.  
For had the tales been true which reached my  
    ear,  
Surely my Lord, all smitten through and through,  
I had gaped with wounds like some wide-meshèd  
    net.  
And had he died, as it was bruited oft,  
He must like Geryon have three times put on  
His earthy garment of mortality,

Dying afresh with each and every change.  
Tortured by such reports I oft had bound  
The cord about my neck ; as oft my friends  
Loosened the fatal knot in my despite.  
And therefore marvel not our child, the first  
And dearest pledge of our exchanged vows,  
Orestes, is away. Him rears and tends  
Strophius of Phocis, our ally and friend,  
Who sagely warned me of this twofold risk—  
Danger to thee whilst fighting before Troy,  
And troublous risings 'gainst the public laws :  
For men are base, and ever take delight  
To trample on the fallen. Trust me, dear  
My Lord, there lurks no falsehood in this speech :  
Weeping o'ermuch hath e'en dried up the fount  
Of my abundant tears ; and my poor eyes,  
Worn with long watching for the beacon lights  
That never made us answer, are cried out.  
Oft too the gnat's shrill trumpet broke my  
dreams—  
Dreams of affright for thee, crowded within  
The insufficient compass of my sleep.  
But as I uncomplaining bore my grief,

So now, dear Lord, I bid thee welcome home—  
True as the faithful watch-dog of the fold,  
Strong as the mainstay of the labouring bark,  
Stately as column, fond as only child,  
Dear as the land to shipwrecked mariner,  
Bright as fair sunshine after winter's storms,  
Sweet as fresh fount to thirsty wanderer—  
All this, and more, thou art, dear love, to me.  
Be gracious, Heaven. Full sore has been our  
    load  
Of grief and care—and now, dear Heart, step down  
From out thy chariot—but let not, I pray,  
Thy conqueror's foot be soiled by touch of earth.  
Ho! maidens, swift with purple strew his path,  
And bring him home for whom we dared not  
    hope.  
As for the rest, my sleepless care shall see  
To order all things as the Gods decree.

## AGAMEMNON.

Daughter of Leda, guardian of my home,  
Well hast thou spoken of my absence long;  
And long has been thy speech. But as for praise,

That fitly comes from other lips than thine.  
And treat me not in guise effeminate,  
Nor bow before me, like barbaric prince,  
With servile cry or prostrate form; nor strew  
These purple tapestries along my path,  
On which no mortal man may dare to tread,  
Lest he arouse the envy of the Gods,  
To whom alone such homage high belongs.  
Give me the honour of a simple man.  
My fame stands not in need of carpetings,  
Or broidered gewgaws; for God's greatest gift  
Is a well ordered mind; and he alone  
Is blest who ends his days in happiness—  
Happy my lot, if so it fare with me!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, speak not thus my purpose to oppose.

AGAMEMNON.

Nay, dream not I my purpose will forego

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Didst thou then vow this in some hour of fear

AGAMEMNON.

I speak as one whose mind is well assured.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What would King Priam in thy place have done ?

AGAMEMNON.

On these embroideries he 'ld stalk amain.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Dost fear the idle censure of men's tongues ?

AGAMEMNON.

Public repute is not an idle vaunt.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Who hath not envy, hath not honour's meed.

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis not a woman's part to love dispute.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis for a conqueror to give up his will.

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AGAMEMNON.

Dost value then the palm of this debate :

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Yes ; yield thee willingly.

AGAMEMNON.

Well, as thou wilt—

Ho ! some one loose the sandal from my foot,  
Lest as I trample on these purple gawds  
Some swift displeasure from the far-off Gods  
Strike me to death. In sooth I fear to tread  
With wasteful luxury the costly web.  
Enough of this.

Thy stranger guest receive  
With gentle care : Heaven smiles on those who  
use

Their conquests gently : for 'tis hard to bow  
A freeborn neck to foreign slavery.  
And she, the fairest flower and choicest prize,  
The Army's gift, has hither followed me.  
And now, consenting to thy will, I come  
Over these tap'stries to my palace home.



## CLYTEMNESTRA.

There is the sea, and who shall drain its depths,  
With its unbounded hoards of purple dye,  
Worthy their weight in gold? \* Nor is there  
stint

Of such-like wealth within our household stores.  
Right gladly too, if oracle or shrine  
Had laid this load upon me, when I sought  
A ransom for thine oft imperilled life,  
I would have vowed rich carpetings and rare.  
Thou art like root of some o'ershadowing tree  
That dims the fury of the dogstar's heat;  
Thou art like summer's warmth to winter's cold  
Returning to thy home. Ah me! when Jove  
Presses the juice of the unripened grape,  
How cold that home shall be, e'en though its Lord  
Is once more in its halls. O mighty Jove,  
That bringest all things to their fateful end,  
To these my prayers their fated answer send.

\* The sense of the original is I think of precious metals rather than of any one particular metal; gold implies this to an English reader, and therefore I use it in preference to silver, which most translators have adopted.

## CHORUS.

Before my heart a thing of fear  
Ever sitteth, ever flitteth,  
And in my ears I seem to hear  
A boding strain, unbought, unsought :  
And as in dreams dark, dim, unknown,  
Courage deserts my bosom's throne.

My hope had passed its prime  
What time  
Our galleys came to land  
By Ilium's sandy strand :  
And our host in set array  
'Neath her walls embattled lay.

Yes—they come—and though my eyes

Witness to their safe return,  
All around me seems to rise

Unmusical and harsh and stern,  
A strain which confidence might daunt,  
A strain which Furies love to chaunt.

As I hearken to that strain,  
Sure my fears are not in vain :  
Not in vain my storm-vex'd mind  
Rolls in eddies dark and blind—

Yet let the presage pass away,  
Brightening to a better day.

The insatiate lust of power and pride  
No limit knows, yet hard beside  
    Dwell woe and mortal grief;  
And human fate all recklessly  
Goes speeding o'er th' unwarning sea,  
    To strike upon the hidden reef.

And Prudence warns with fearful voice  
To make some timely sacrifice,  
    Uttering her sage behest ;—  
So might the House escape the doom,  
So might the sinking bark come home,  
    Safe to the haven's rest.

With many a gift Jove knows to bless,  
From the teeming fallow's side,  
From his own rich bounteousness :  
But when once life's purple tide  
To the earth has flowed amain,  
What mortal art or magic strain

Can call that life-blood back again?  
The King of Heaven himself forbade\*  
The great Physician to recall  
    To life, of all  
The realm of shadows e'en one single shade.  
The Fate that sits above the skies  
And rules all other Destinies,  
Bids my prophetic tongue be still  
To words and presages of ill.  
But still with hidden fires aglow,  
    In hopelessness  
    And bitterness,  
My soul broods o'er a coming woe.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Come thou within, Cassandra. Jove with thee  
Hath gently dealt, in that He makes thee  
    share  
With other slaves the shelter of this roof,  
And the protection of our household shrine.  
Step down from out thy car—and be not proud;

. \* This refers to the legend of Æsculapius thunder-smitten by Jove for bringing back the dead to life.

Alcmena's son once bore to be a slave,  
And bent his neck unto the yoke : so thou,  
Since Fate so wills it, joy at least to be  
Slave in an ancient and a lordly house.  
For harsh are they who suddenly have reaped  
An unexpected harvest of great wealth.  
Thou knowest now the usage of this House.

## CHORUS.

To thee, Cassandra, hath our Lady spoke.  
And, since thou art within the toils of fate,  
Yield if thou canst—and yet thou may'st refuse.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, but like swallow coming from abroad  
She speaks a strange outlandish speech ; and I  
Am vainly striving to convince her mind.

## CHORUS.

Yield thee—she counsels wisely. Leave thy seat  
And follow her within.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have no time

To wait this woman's fancies at the door.  
Beside the household altar stand the sheep,  
Waiting the sacrifice of thankful hearts,  
Which we ne'er thought to pay. Come then,  
declare  
Forthwith thy purpose ; if thou hearest not,  
Make plain by gesture\* what thou canst not speak.

## CHORUS.

'Tis clear she needeth an interpreter,  
Our stranger fair—in sooth her manner is  
Like some wild creature's taken in the toils.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, but she raves, and evil counsel takes  
From a disordered mind. Her native land  
Lies desolate ; but she, like unbroke steed,  
Chafes at her bit, and foams in blood away  
Her strength. I will not waste my words or bear  
The floutings of her pride.

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

\* I have adhered to the sense of the original, though there is an obvious inconsistency in desiring Cassandra to answer by sign of hand what she could not understand when expressed by word of mouth.

CHORUS.

Not so—for I  
Compassionate her grief, and am not wroth.  
Come then, unhappy one, and quit thy seat;  
Handsel the yoke which Fate hath made thee  
bear.

CASSANDRA.

Woe, woe—woe worth the day—Apollo Lord—

CHORUS.

Why wail'st thou of Apollo? He forsooth  
Is not a God to love a strain of woe.

CASSANDRA.

Woe, woe—woe worth the day—Apollo Lord—

CHORUS.

Again with words of evil omen she  
Calleth on one who hath no love for grief.

CASSANDRA.

Apollo, O Apollo, God of Ways,

---

God my destroyer—now a second time  
Thou hast destroyed me!

CHORUS.

Sure—she speaks like one  
Inspired with her own calamities ;  
And though a slave she hath the gift divine.

CASSANDRA.

Apollo; O Apollo, God of Ways,  
Apollo my destroyer, whither, where,  
Unto what dwelling hast thou led my steps ?

CHORUS.

Unto the house of the Atreidæ, sure.  
I speak the truth—true thou shalt find my  
words.

CASSANDRA.

Aye, to a house abhorred of Heaven, whose walls  
Can tell of kinsmen's crimes and woes—a house  
That reeks of human butchery and gore.



CHORUS.

Like some keen-scented hound this stranger maid  
Seems hunting out the tracks of murder foul.

CASSANDRA.

I have a proof which I cannot gainsay—  
I seem to see the forms of wailing babes,  
And a sire feasting on his children's flesh.

CHORUS.

The fame of thy divining lore ere this  
Had reached us ; but we covet not thy gifts.

CASSANDRA.

Woe's me—what is the plan, the deadly plan,  
Born in the caverns of her brooding mind?—  
And help stands far aloof.

CHORUS.

I am unskilled  
To read these riddles, though we all know well  
The older story of that ancient crime.

CASSANDRA.

Ah, wretched woman, wilt thou do the deed?—  
And he thy lord and husband, e'en as he  
Steps from the bath—how shall I tell the tale?  
Swift to the fatal issue moves the crime,  
And hand on hand is dealing forth the blows.

CHORUS.

I cannot read her meaning : and my mind,  
'Wilder'd at these dark sayings, sinks and fails.

CASSANDRA.

Ah me, what ghastly sight is this I see—  
The infernal trammels of a deadly net  
Around its victim cast!—She is that net,  
The wife and the accomplice of the crime—  
Yell then, insatiate band of Furies, yell  
Your hymn of woe o'er the accursed deed!

CHORUS.

What is this Fury whom thou call'st so loud  
To sound her trumpet-blast within these walls?  
Thy speech affrights me ; and the ruddy tide,

Which in man's last extremity doth keep  
Sure time and pace with life's departing rays,  
Flies backward to my heart. Yet Fate moves on.

## CASSANDRA.

Lo where the bull with his black horns lies caught  
Within the subtle meshes of her robe—  
Ho! save him from his mate. She strikes—He  
falls,  
Falls in the brimming, treacherous, deadly bath—  
What that bath witnesseth I dare not say.

## CHORUS.

I have no skill to be th' interpreter  
Of oracles, and yet I fear her words  
Bode evil—but why speak of oracles?  
The wordy arts of sad diviner's lore  
Bring only fear and sorrow to man's race.

## CASSANDRA.

Ah me, most hapless! Though I pour my grief  
Into the cup of common woe, and share  
The common lot, yet will I tell it forth—

For why, my master, hast thou brought me here  
But to die with thee? Yet, in sooth, why not?

## CHORUS.

Insensate! God-possessed! Thy dismal chaunt  
Is like the strain of tawny nightingale,  
Who ceaseless ever of her grief and song  
For Itys, Itys makes her life-long moan.

## CASSANDRA.

Yes—the sweet nightingale declares her fate.  
The Gods enrobed her in a wingèd form;  
And granted her a tearless life of song.  
But the sharp sword is my abiding doom.

## CHORUS.

Whence this ungoverned and inspired grief—  
Wild words of fear in shrill and dismal song?  
Where didst thou learn thy melancholy lore?

## CASSANDRA.

Woe for the wedding by which Paris brought  
Destruction on his friends!—woe too for thee,

My native stream, Scamander! By thy banks  
In happier days my childhood's prime was spent ;  
But soon, methinks, upon the fatal shores  
Of Acheron and dark Cocytus, I  
Must chaunt my latest and prophetic dirge.

## CHORUS.

Now thou dost speak in words so clear, a child  
May read thy meaning. As I list thy wail—  
Thy strange, disastrous wail—a deadly pang  
Pierces my heart, and smites me through and  
through.

## CASSANDRA.

Woe for my town, my native perished town !  
Not all the kine that fed in Troy's deep meads,  
Which my sire offered to the Immortal Gods,  
Availed to save her towers from overthrow.  
And I too, I, shall soon be lying low.

## CHORUS.

Again, again,—sure some malignant God  
Inspires thy mournful, deathsome melody ;  
And what the issue I cannot foretell.

## CASSANDRA.

No longer shall my prophecy be dark,  
And shrouded like a timid bride that peeps  
From out her veil ; nay, rather like the wave  
That at sun-rising tosses its white crest  
Against the brightening line of angry sky—  
A woe yet greater than my own despair.  
And now no more in riddles will I speak.  
Then mark how I, like questing hound, pursue  
With quick keen scent the track of ancient crime ;  
For never shall they quit these halls, that ghastly  
crew,  
That sing in unison, not melody,  
A masque of Sister Furies, drunk with blood  
And ever-growing boldness. As they crouch,  
They chaunt the story of an ancient curse—  
The incestuous couch, a brother's shameful wrong,  
A brother's deadly wrath.—Am I not right ?  
Have I not hit, like archer true, the mark ?  
Or like some babbling vagrant do I deal  
In idle prophecy ? Come, swear to me and say  
If I have truly told the ancient crimes  
Of this devoted House ?

CHORUS.

Nay wherefore swear ?

What healing virtue in an oath ? And yet  
How doth a stranger born beyond the seas  
Speak of another land as though 'twere hers ?

CASSANDRA.

My prophet lore was by Apollo given.

CHORUS.

Was it for love of thee the God was moved ?

CASSANDRA.

Yes : but till now from shame I dared not speak.

CHORUS.

They who fare well, grow dainty in their talk.

CASSANDRA.

Full was the measure of his love and grace.

CHORUS.

And were ye joined in wedlock's solemn bond ?

---

CASSANDRA.

I pledged my troth and then deceived the God.

CHORUS.

But not until the soothsayer's art was thine ?

CASSANDRA.

E'en then I had foretold my country's woes.

CHORUS.

And didst thou go unscathed by Loxias' wrath ?

CASSANDRA.

It was my penalty that none believed.

CHORUS.

And yet to us thy warning words seem true.

CASSANDRA.

Woe's me—once more the spirit of my Art,  
My true and dreadful Art, comes over me,  
And racks and rends me as I strive to speak.  
Lo ! where they crouch, like phantoms of a dream,



The forms of children foully done to death  
By their own kindred, holding in their hands  
Their own flesh and their entrails—piteous sight—  
On which their sire himself must feast anon.  
And now, in retribution for these deeds,  
There plotteth one against my master's life—  
My master? Yes, for am I not a slave?—  
There plotteth, wallowing in another's lair,  
A treacherous, craven lion in the house;  
And little dreams the conqueror of Troy,  
The ruler of the fleet, how She forsooth,  
With tongue of hateful dog and fawning mien,  
Like some sad secret Destiny, shall bring  
These woeful fortunes to their fatal end.  
She dares it all—the woman dares to be  
The slayer of the man. But how shall I  
Rightly declare her?—*amphisbœna* dire?  
Or some rock-haunting *Scylla*, fatal curse  
Of mariner? or raging dam of Hell,  
Breathing fierce war on kith and kin and friends?  
Hark! how she shouted o'er him as men shout  
When turns the battle! Yet she feigns to feel  
Joy in his safe return! But 'tis all one

---

Whether my words gain credence—time shall  
show :

And thou ere long shalt see, and pitying own  
I was in sooth too true a prophetess.

CHORUS.

When thou didst tell me of Thyestes' feast  
I understood, and held my breath for awe,  
To hear the truth, the very truth, declared :  
But for the rest of thy mysterious words,  
Like runner in a race, I run at fault.

CASSANDRA.

Thou Agamemnon's death thyself shalt see.

CHORUS.

Hush ! wretched woman, keep thy lips from ill.

CASSANDRA.

This is an ill beyond the healer's art.

CHORUS.

May Heaven in mercy spare what you foretell.

CASSANDRA.

While you protest, they plan the murderous deed.

CHORUS.

Who is the man to do this cursed act ?

CASSANDRA.

Your question shows you miss my true intent.

CHORUS.

I cannot comprehend these guilty plots.

CASSANDRA.

'Tis not because I do not speak thy tongue.

CHORUS.

Aye—and canst prophesy, though dark thy speech.

CASSANDRA.

Gods! I'm consumed by the prophetic fire—  
Woe's me, Apollo, Slayer of the Wolves ; \*

\* Lycæan or Slayer of Wolves was one of Apollo's attributes. In another of the Æschylean Plays he is entreated to slay the enemies even

This human lioness, the base wolf's mate,  
What time the generous lion's far from home,  
Shall murder me. Aye, as she whets her sword  
To slay the man, like one who drugs the bowl,  
She pours into the cup of wrath my life,  
Repaying by my death my bringing here.  
Why wear I then the symbols of my art—  
The prophet's necklace, the diviner's staff?  
They shall not live at least to see my doom—  
Go to destruction, whither I go too,—  
Go and enrich some other hapless maid.  
Aye—He himself looks on and sees me scorned,  
Unjustly scorned by friends and foes alike,  
Tricked in these idle gawds—Apollo, He  
Now strips me bare of my prophetic robe;  
And I, who have endured to bear the name  
Of poor, starved, lying vagrant,—I, on whom,  
A prophetess, the prophet God has wreaked  
His vengeance, now am led to Death's dark road.  
And 'stead of altar in my father's house,

as he once slew the wolves (Sep. c. Theb. 131). And here in similar fashion his wrath is invoked against the base wolf *Ægisthus* who is plotting the murder of the noble lion *Agamemnon*.

The block now waits me with its murderous  
stroke.

Yet shall we not fall unavenged by Heaven,  
For there shall come one to requite our death ;  
A mother's slayer, one who shall exact  
Price for a father's life. Yes, though afar  
He wanders exiled and outcast from home,  
Yet shall he come to gladden his friends' eyes,  
And place the crowning and the coping stone  
On this dark cruel work of destiny.

For a great oath is registered above,  
That his dead sire lying with upturned face  
Shall bring him home. But why make I this  
moan—

I who have seen the ruin of fair Troy,  
I who now see her conquerors in turn  
By Heaven's decree departing to their place ?  
Shall I not also go, and dare to die ?  
I make my prayer unto the gates of Death,  
That without moan or struggle, while life's  
blood

Flows freely 'neath the mortal stroke, my spirit  
May pass away, and my eyes close in night.

---

CHORUS.

O maiden most unfortunate, most wise,  
If in thy long and woeful prophecy  
Thou truly know'st thy fate, how dost thou  
    dare  
To walk unmoved and fearless to thy doom,  
Like some poor heifer to the sacrifice ?

CASSANDRA.

'Tis but a respite—there is no escape.

CHORUS.

Yet he who suffers last, doth gain in time.

CASSANDRA.

My day hath come : 'twere little worth to fly.

CHORUS.

Thy daring spirit leads thee to thy doom.

CASSANDRA.

Yet to die nobly is a gift from God.

CHORUS.

The happy tell, forsooth, another tale.

CASSANDRA.

Alas, my sire, for thee and for thy race !

CHORUS.

What dost thou strain at with such fearful eyes ?

CASSANDRA.

Alas—alas!—

CHORUS.

What is this secret terror of thy soul ?

CASSANDRA.

The smell of blood is clinging to these walls.

CHORUS.

'Tis but the odour of the sacrifice.

CASSANDRA.

Nay—'tis the reek as of some charnel house.

CHORUS.

Thy words at least breathe not of Syrian balm.

CASSANDRA.

Yes—I will go, and in these halls will chaunt  
The dirge of Agamemnon and myself.  
Enough of life.—Farewell, my friends—and yet  
'Tis not for fear I shrink like the poor bird  
That vainly shivers at the deadly snare.  
Nay, bear me witness in my coming death—  
When in my place another woman dies,  
And in the place of an ill-mated man  
Another man shall fall, witness my words—  
I claim this boon as one about to die.

CHORUS.

Thou hast my pity in thy foreseen doom.

CASSANDRA.

Yet once again I'll sing my dying strain ;  
And as I look the last time on the sun,  
I call on my avengers to repay  
Vengeance upon my murderers for me,



A helpless captive and an easy prey.  
Alas for human fortunes ! In the hour  
Of triumph shaken by a shadow's shade,  
And in adversity their record washed  
As with a sponge from off the page of life.  
Of two such ills I pity most the last.

CASSANDRA *enters the Palace.*

CHORUS.

Alas for human happiness,  
Howsoever great it be—  
Mortals never wish it less ;  
Never comes satiety.  
No man warns the rich and great  
From the shelter of his gate.  
By the gracious will of Heaven  
To our sovereign Lord 'twas given  
To subdue great Priam's town  
And see his native land once more,  
Crowned with glory and renown.  
But now if in the hour  
Of pride and conscious power  
He dies, and pays unto the dead

The price of blood once foully shed  
In the distant days of yore,  
Who amongst mortal men shall dare  
To count his life as free from care?

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

Help! I am smitten with a deadly blow.

1ST CHORUS.

Silence! Who says he's wounded fatally?

AGAMEMNON.

Help! help! I'm smitten by another blow.

2ND CHORUS.

Our Sovereign's cries declare the deed is done.

3RD CHORUS.

Come, let us counsel take for action sure.

4TH CHORUS.

I give my voice that we should straitly call  
Here to the rescue Argos' citizens.

## 5TH CHORUS.

My counsel is—fall on at once and find  
Proof of the deed in the blood-dripping blade.

## 6TH CHORUS.

I do agree, and vote for action swift ;  
This bloody juncture will not brook delay.

## 7TH CHORUS.

The signs are clear. It is the overture  
Of the new tyranny they meditate.

## 8TH CHORUS.

While we debate, they trample under foot  
Thought for delay—their right hand slumbers not.

## 9TH CHORUS.

I know not what to counsel. We as yet  
Know not the author of the bloody deed.

## 10TH CHORUS.

I do agree. Pause we awhile ; for sure  
Words will not call the dead to life again.

---

11TH CHORUS.

What! Shall we live by base consent to those  
Whose usurpation 'tis a shame to bear?

12TH CHORUS.

That were past suff'rance. Let us fall like men,  
For better far is death than slavery.

13TH CHORUS.

But hold—are we prepared to say these groans  
Are certain proof of this man's bloody end?

14TH CHORUS.

True—let us know for sure of what we speak;  
For guess and knowledge ever are at strife.

15TH CHORUS.

By many reasons moved I give my vote  
That we should learn how Agamemnon fares.

*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA.\*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If oft I spake in different strain from what

\* The scene was here probably opened, and a wheeled platform brought forward showing the dead bodies of Agamemnon and

I now shall speak, for this I take no shame.  
How else could we under affection's guise,  
In deadly conflict with our deadly foes,  
Entrap them in a snare whose fatal bounds  
Transcend their utmost power to escape?  
Though long I waited, long I did forecast  
This final wrestle of an ancient feud.  
The deed is done. I smote him where I stand;  
I smote him—yes, I scorn to lie—past cure  
And past escape. Round him I wrapp'd the  
    robe  
With its entangling and destroying folds,  
Like net around the fish. I smote him twice,  
And with two groans he slack'd his limbs in  
    death:  
Then as he lay I dealt him a third blow,  
As a thanksgiving to the Infernal God,  
The Keeper of the Dead. Thus chafing sore  
In rage and impotence he falls and dies;  
And as in blood he gasps away his breath

Cassandra, with Clytemnestra standing over them. Therefore she says, "I smote him where I stand;" and the Chorus, later on, "See her—like hateful raven o'er him stand."

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One drop of that black gory dew springs forth  
And falls upon me—with as soft a touch  
As heaven-sent rain upon the teeming corn.  
Wherefore, ye Argive Elders, shout for joy—  
If ye rejoice. I glory in the deed.  
And were it meet, I would libation make  
Over this corpse: for just it were that he  
Who filled our cup with curses to the brim  
In life, should dying drain it to the dregs.

## CHORUS.

We marvel at thy bold bad speech—who thus  
Over thy murdered husband boastest loud.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ye reason with me e'en as though I were  
Some witless woman—praise me, as ye list,  
Or blame, 'tis all alike. Yet I will say,  
With fearless heart, to those who know me well—  
“Here Agamemnon lies, my husband once,  
“And now a corpse—the work of my right  
hand—  
“My justice-dealing hand.”—My say is said.

## CHORUS.

In earth's dark breast what poison'd weed,  
What drug from out the flowing sea  
Has maddened thee to do this deed,  
And take this load of guilt on thee?  
Thou hast on thee a people's hate,  
Thou hast cast off and slain thy mate;  
And thou from Argos shalt most surely be  
Outcast and loathed for thy impiety.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

And dare you solemnly adjudge me thus  
To public hatred and to exile's ban?  
You who did never charge reproof on him?  
Who with unnumbered sheep within his folds,  
And, as tho' slaughtering some worthless beast,  
Chose his own daughter for the sacrifice—  
My dearest darling—by her blood to charm  
Into repose the boisterous winds of Thrace.  
Was it not meet in retribution just  
For such foul crimes to cast him forth the land?—  
Yet soon as you hear tell of my misdeeds,  
Straightway you judge me guilty. But beware:

You threaten one who renders like for like.  
Rule me, if you by the strong hand can rule ;  
But if God otherwise decree, be sure  
You shall learn wisdom, though you learn it late.

## CHORUS.

Proud of soul and speech thou art,  
Murder maddens in thy heart ;  
And there glistens on thy brow  
A dark spot that will not go,  
And cries for vengeance. But the time  
Shall surely come, when friendless thou  
Stroke for stroke, and blow for blow,  
Shalt expiate thy deadly crime.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hearken ye further to my solemn oath :  
Yes—I swear by the vengeance I have wrought  
For my dead child—by Até, Goddess stern,  
And the dread Fury, unto whom this day  
I sacrificed that man, I have no thought—  
So long as he, Ægisthus ever kind,  
My buckler of defence, abideth here,



Lighting my fire upon the household hearth—  
I have no thought to tread the halls of Fear.  
Yes—low he lies, that woman's paramour,  
The minion of his Trojan Chryseids.  
Low too she lies, captive and soothsayer,  
The fortune-telling partner of his couch,  
His faithful friend and mate, who shared with him  
The rude seats of his ship. They have fared well.  
He here lies dead. She by her lover's side,  
Like swan that chaunts her death-wail, she too lies,  
And in her death a dainty vengeance brings  
For the wrong done unto my marriage bed.

## CHORUS.

Would that without the pang of pain or fret of slow  
disease  
Swift death might come with endless sleep and  
bring unto me ease;  
Now that my dearest Lord and King,  
Through a woman suffering,  
By a woman's hand lies slain.  
Insensate Helen! thou didst once destroy  
Lives, many lives beneath the walls of Troy.

---

Alone thou didst it. Now again  
Thou givest bloom and perfect life  
To that immemorial strife  
Which once blazed high within these halls,  
And now upon their master falls,  
With doom and desolation rife.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Seek not death to set thee free ;  
Blame not Helen, as though she  
Alone upon our host had brought  
Death and ruin, and had wrought  
Never ending misery.

## CHORUS.

Dark Fiend, whose vengeful force doth fall  
On the twin line and royal hall  
Of ancient Tantalus—thy sway  
Wielded by a woman's hand,  
Smites like stroke of piercing brand.—  
See her—mark her, where he lay,  
Like hateful raven o'er him stand,  
Chaunting a foul discordant lay.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Rightly, truly dost thou name  
In thy words the cause of ill—  
The ancient Demon of the race,  
From whom the lust of blood once came,  
By whom that lust is nurtured still ;  
For ere the old wound heals, the new one bleeds  
apace.

## CHORUS.

In mighty strength, in deadly ire,  
Comes that Demon's visitation,  
And in sequence grim conspire  
Insatiate woe and desolation.  
But Jove, alas, and Jove alone  
This woe has caused, this deed has wrought,  
For amongst mortals there is nought  
But by Jove's will and power is done.  
O my gracious Lord and King,  
How shall I bewail thy fate ?  
How to thee my tribute bring,  
Tender and affectionate ?  
In this spider's web entangled,

---

Slain by an unholy death,  
By the two edged falchion mangled,  
Dying thou didst yield thy breath.  
Woe for thy bloody and unhonoured tomb,  
Woe for thy cruel and perfidious doom.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Think not I did the deed, nor dream  
That I am truly what I seem :  
I am not Agamemnon's mate,  
But the fierce fiend, the avenging Fate,  
Atreus' cruel feast repaying,  
Full-grown man for children slaying,  
In her semblance incarnate.

## CHORUS.

Though the dread fiend, that watches o'er  
The ancestral curse from days of yore,  
Gave his aid, thou shalt not be  
From this guiltiness set free.  
Borne upon streams of kindred blood,  
The God of slaughter speeds his way ;

Nor shall he check his course or stay  
The torrent of that darkling flood,  
Till full vengeance he hath ta'en  
For those children foully slain.

O my gracious Lord and King,  
How shall I bewail thy fate?  
How to thee my tribute bring,  
Tender and affectionate?  
In this spider's web entangled,  
Slain by an unholy death,  
By the two-edged falchion mangled,  
Dying thou didst yield thy breath.  
Woe for thy bloody and unhonoured tomb,  
Woe for thy cruel and perfidious doom.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Yet not unworthy was his doom,  
Who brought this curse upon our home,  
And slew his child—his child and mine—  
The offshoot of a common line,  
For whom my tears shall ever flow,  
For whom my grief no bounds shall know.  
Yes—let him go and boast below,

---

For bloody deeds that he hath done,  
By death his bloody guerdon won.

## CHORUS.

With reason reft and reeling brain  
I strive to think and strive in vain :  
Where shall I turn or whither go !  
Now the Royal House lies low ;  
Whilst around me falls amain  
Not in drops the bloody rain ;  
Shaking ever, as it falls,  
To their base the palace walls ?  
And now again remorseless Fate  
For another deed of hate  
    Sharpens the edge of Justice' sword.  
O Earth, Earth, Earth, would in thy breast  
My weary limbs had sunk to rest,  
    Ere I had seen my dearest Lord  
In bath of silver lying low,  
Where he met his deadly blow.  
Who shall bury ? Who shall mourn ?  
Thou, his murderess, wilt thou dare  
With tearful chaunt and funeral prayer

To speed him to his final bourne?  
Ah! thankless honours to the dead,  
Who by thy hand is lowly laid—

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

By our hand he fell and died;  
Our hand shall his grave provide,  
Though no mourning throng attend  
To convoy him to his end.

Fret thee not with care like this.  
Him lovingly his child shall meet  
By the swift stream of sighs, and greet  
With fond embrace and tender kiss.

## CHORUS.

Hard it is to speak, I ween,  
Judgment fair such foes between:  
Yet reproach and mortal blame  
Ever follow wrong and shame;  
He who spoiled, is spoiled again,  
He who slew in turn is slain;  
And, while Jove himself endure,  
Stands this doom for ever sure—

---

That the doer of the deed  
Shall receive the fitting meed.

Ah ! who can banish from these walls  
The ancestral curse of Destiny ?  
'Tis wedded to these ancient halls.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now thou speakest true, and I  
With the Demon of the race  
Will compact make most willingly  
That I this burden bear ; and he  
Faring hence to other place,  
Shall to murderous feud consign  
Members of another line.  
Enough for me some slender share  
Of household wealth, if free from care ;  
So the House released may be  
From this deadly frenesy.

*Enter ÆGISTHUS.*

ÆGISTHUS.

Now hath the light of this most welcome day  
Brought round the hour of vengeance. Surely now



The blessed Gods, avengers of men's sins,  
Watch from high heaven these cursed deeds of  
wrong.

So say I now, when, to my heart's content,  
I see him lie entangled in the robe,  
Whose woven meshes the dread Furies cast  
Around him, and behold him expiate  
In his own death his father's treachery.  
For this man's father, Atreus, when of yore  
He ruled in Argos, moved by rivalry,  
Drove from his home and native land my sire  
Thyestes, his own brother. Yet ere long  
Returned Thyestes from his exile, and,  
Sitting a suppliant at the household hearth,  
Found an escape from punishment and death.  
And then, in token of good faith and love,  
Atreus, the accursed father of this man,  
Making pretence of gladsome holiday,  
In solemn banquet, spread before my sire  
The flesh of his own children. At the board  
Atreus sat all apart, in fragments small  
Mincing the tender joints of hand and foot;  
While, all in ignorance, my sire partook

The fiendish food disastrous to our House.  
But when he knew the truth, spurning the  
    feast,  
And sickening o'er the loathly butchery,  
With loud lament and imprecations dire  
On the Pelopidæ, he made his prayer  
That deep destruction might o'erwhelm the  
    race.

Therefore this man was slain ; and therefore I  
Did righteously devise this deed of blood—  
I who was once with my sad sire driven forth,  
His thirteenth child, a tender babe ; and whom  
Avenging justice hath brought back to-day.  
Far off I wove the cunning snare. Far off  
I smote him. Death were welcome now that I  
See him within the toils of vengeance ta'en.

## CHORUS.

Foul fare the man who vaunts himself upon  
Others' calamities—foul the boast that thou  
Alone didst plan and do this murderous deed.  
The wrath and fury of a people's hate,  
Be well assured, shall fall upon thy head.

## ÆGISTHUS.

Dar'st thou speak thus to me, presumptuous slave,  
The lowest rower in the ship of State ?  
Old as thou art, thou shalt perforce with grief  
Learn to be wise : for chains and hunger's pangs  
Are stern physicians to the wayward mind,  
E'en of old age. Hast thou not eyes to see ?  
Kick not against the pricks, lest thou shouldst  
fall.

## CHORUS.

And couldst thou, woman, plot against thy Lord,  
Thy warrior Lord returning from the fight,  
Foul murder and dishonour ? Thou, who wert  
The guardian of his house.

## ÆGISTHUS.

Forbear—these words  
Are the forerunners of a bitter strife.  
Thy tongue hath none of Orpheus' harmony ;  
For by the gladsome strains of his sweet voice  
He drew all nature captive : thou like cur,  
Whose senseless yelping angers but harms not,

---

Shalt be led captive, till thou learn'st to be  
Gentler of speech.

CHORUS.

And dream'st thou then, fair Lord,  
That thou forsooth shalt rule in Argos? Thou—  
Thou, who didst plot, but dar'dst not do the deed?

ÆGISTHUS.

Treason is woman's work—She did the deed :  
For I, his ancient foeman, was suspect,  
And might not slay him : but his hoarded wealth  
Is mine and makes me King in Argos now.  
And every rebel I will bind, like colt  
O'erfed and wanton, in a heavy yoke,  
Till hunger's pangs and darkness' kindred pow'r  
Tame his unruly spirit to obey.

CHORUS.

Coward, thou didst not dare to slay thy foe ;  
But she, his wife, abhorred of God and man,  
She did the deed. And lives Orestes yet ?  
Lives he to come with favouring Fortune's aid,  
And vengeance take on this accursed pair ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Beware—a reck'ning comes for speech like this.

CHORUS.

Ho to the rescue!—strife is near at hand.

ÆGISTHUS.

†       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

CHORUS.

Ho there! my comrades—out with every blade.

ÆGISTHUS.

I too fear not to die with hand on hilt.

CHORUS.

We take thee at thy word—for die thou shalt.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Forbear, dear friend, we will not shed more blood.  
Enough—more than enough of woe is wrought,

† The line is wanting in the original.

---

And sad the harvest which our hands must  
reap.

Go hence, old men, to your appointed homes  
Before ye suffer aught. We are content  
To bear the lot of our own act and choice ;  
And of man's common heritage of woe  
We have our share. Us the fell demon's wrath  
Hath sorely smitten—Such the counsel which  
A woman gives, if men will heed her words.

ÆGISTHUS.

But shall they flout the rulers of the land,  
Giving free licence to a slanderous tongue,  
And scattering words of senseless arrogance ?

CHORUS.

A free-born Argive knows not how to cringe.

ÆGISTHUS.

The day will come when I shall reach thee yet.

CHORUS.

Not if Heaven leads Orestes safely home.

ÆGISTHUS.

Aye—outcasts feed their minds on airy hopes!

CHORUS.

Do then thy will—befoul fair Justice' form,  
Fatten and thrive on wrong. Thou hast the power.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou shalt repay me for this insolence.

CHORUS.

Go! Utter loud and confident thy boasts,  
Like shrill-tongued cock that struts beside its mate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Heed not their currish snarls: we two, methinks,  
Can rule and order all things in our home.

THE END.

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